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PP RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHMT RUEHQI RUEHVC  
DE RUEHOT #0278/01 0972102

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 072102Z APR 09

FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9314

INFO RUCNCCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 2284

RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 0049

RHMFISS/CDR NORAD PETERSON AFB CO PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USNORTHCOM PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 OTTAWA 000278

NOFORN

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [RS](#) [GG](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: CANADA'S "CALIBRATED" RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIA IN STEP WITH U.S.

REF: A. OTTAWA 8

[¶](#)B. 08 OTTAWA 1140

[¶](#)C. 08 OTTAWA 1137

[¶](#)D. MOSCOW 833

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: Russia is seeking strong re-engagement with Canada following the chilling of relations after the Russian invasion of Georgia and "Russian provocations in the Arctic." Canada nonetheless recognizes the need to work with Russia, given the many intersecting areas of mutual concern, and plans to pursue a policy of "calibrated re-engagement." Canada assesses that Russia wants a cooperative relationship with NATO in regard to Afghanistan, narcotics, and counter-terrorism, even as it seeks Western buy-in for a new European security architecture, about which Canada is "very skeptical." Canada's core interests require it to seek Russian cooperation in stabilizing Afghanistan and building transparency and confidence mechanisms in the Arctic. Canada is considering Russian overtures for a new notification regime for military long-range aviation in the Arctic, but wishes to coordinate an agreed position with the U.S. beforehand. End summary.

TOUGH TALK

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[¶](#)2. (C/NF) Following the Russian invasion of Georgia, Canada took a strong stand against Russia (refs a-c), according to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) Russia Division Deputy Director Andrew Shore. He added that the Russians almost immediately sought to return to "business as usual," a move that the Canadians rebuffed, Shore insisted. He opined that Russia and Canada often "talk past each other," with the Russians emphasizing a host of perceived grievances and humiliations at the hands of the West.

[¶](#)3. (C/NF) In a meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Len Edwards immediately after the Russian invasion of Georgia, Russian Ambassador Georgiy Mamedov complained about Canada's "unwillingness to listen Russia" and the desire of Canada and its alliance partners to "humiliate Russia," Shore noted. Edwards took a tough line, and pointed out that the West had created the G-8 and P-5 groupings specifically to include Russia, as well as that Russia was also in the increasingly active G-20. Shore said that Edwards had commented that Russia had, however, responded to these efforts at inclusion by invading its neighbors and using energy supplies as a political tool. Despite the previous chill in bilateral relations, Shore underscored that Canada recognizes Russia is an important country that "cannot be ignored." Canada will therefore pursue a policy that he described as "calibrated re-engagement."

[¶](#)4. (C/NF) Shore praised the new U.S. Administration's overtures toward Russia, especially in the disarmament arena

and, most notably, about the START talks. He also voiced strong Canadian support for Secretary Clinton's high profile efforts to "reset" U.S.-Russian relations. Canadian senior officials are watching closely, said Shore, to see to what extent Russia reciprocates the United States' extended hand.

MAINTAINING DIALOGUE

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¶15. (C/NF) As part of its calibrated re-engagement, Shore described a recent "uptick" in the tempo of visits. DFAIT Assistant Deputy Minister for Bilateral Relations James Fox and Assistant Deputy Minister for Legal Affairs Alan Kessel traveled to Moscow in February for discussions with Deputy Foreign Minister (and Political Director) Ryabkov. Kessel had "long and substantive discussions" on the Arctic, and secured all the meetings he had requested, according to Shore, who noted this was an unusual break from recent custom, when senior Russian officials were often "'unavailable' for unspecified reasons."

¶16. (C/NF) DFAIT Assistant Deputy Minister and Political Director Colleen Swords will visit Moscow on April 21 for strategic stability discussions. Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon is then planning to go to Moscow on April 27 as part of his efforts to visit all the Arctic Council capitals prior to the upcoming Arctic Council meeting. International Trade Minister Stockwell Day is planning a late May visit to Moscow for a bilateral economic dialogue. Ottawa will host a Russian delegation in May for counterterrorism consultations.

Shore added that a Canadian delegation will travel to Moscow for consultations on Latin America following meetings in Brussels with the EU in early May. The Russians have also requested consultations with Canada on Afghanistan, which the

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Canadians are still considering. (DFAIT sent its Director General of the Afghanistan Task Force to the recent meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. See ref d)

YOUR NEIGHBORS FEAR YOU

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¶17. (C/NF) In his February visit to Moscow, ADM Fox carried a strong message to Ryabkov: Canada wants a constructive relationship with Russia, but "you have a problem with your neighbors, who fear you," which creates problems for normal Russian-Canadian relations, Shore said. He related that the Russian response was notable for its "defensiveness and bluster." Shore observed that Fox nonetheless came away with the impression that Russia indeed understood that it is relatively isolated from the international community and that its neighbors do fear it. Shore assessed that Russia definitely wants to engage NATO, but dislikes the Russia-NATO Council. Shore said that Canada took a "very skeptical" view of President Medvedev's new security architecture proposal. He added that Canada was "on the same page as the U.S." in telling the Russians that an extremely robust transatlantic security architecture already exists. He criticized the Russians for their timing in announcing the plan. "You can't say you don't like NATO and the OSCE and then invade your neighbor and expect (the West) will roll over on new security architecture."

¶18. (C/NF) Shore characterized the NATO-Russia relationship as "very complicated" and said that Canada views NATO's current posture of slowing down initiatives with Russia and freezing others while maintaining relations as being the correct policy. Canada would not support cutting off all military-to-military contact with Russia, despite the strong statements from Prime Minister Harper and then-Foreign Minister David Emerson following the Russian invasion of Georgia. Shore noted that the Russian embassy in Ottawa had told him that Canada "reacted the most strongly of all NATO countries" to the Russian actions, including cancellation of their bilateral high level political dialogue last summer. He claimed that Canada had sought unsuccessfully to reschedule those talks in late 2008.

THROUGH A POLAR PRISM

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¶19. (C/NF) In February, Defence Minister Peter MacKay

announced that Canada had scrambled fighters in response to approaching Russian Tupolev 95 bombers that, he said, appeared intent on entering Canadian airspace. Soon after, Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly denounced Russia publicly for its "increasingly aggressive actions" around the world and its long range aviation (LRA) "intrusions" into Canadian airspace. PM Harper's muscular response probably stems partly from his strong emphasis on human rights, democracy, and good governance, according to Shore. In addition, Canada puts a heavy emphasis on its sovereignty in the Arctic; Shore claimed that Russia's "unhelpful rhetoric and actions" in the North animate Canadian responses to Russia outside the Arctic. He commented that the Prime Minister filters his view of the Canadian-Russian bilateral relationship primarily through those prisms, making the PM particularly sensitive to "perceived Russian challenges to Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic."

¶10. (C/NF) According to Shore, Russian interlocutors have reassured Canadian counterparts in several fora recently that Russia wishes to work cooperatively with Canada in the Arctic. Russian Ambassador Mamedov has insisted publicly that Russia had no designs for a power grab in the North, and called instead for discussions and cooperation. Shore commented that Canada was not entirely convinced of Russia's sincerity, and wants to see how Russia lives up to its claimed desire to pursue confidence-building measures and increase transparency in the North. Canada has told Russian officials that Canada would welcome a Russian proposal for building confidence and was open to beginning discussions, according to Shore.

#### THE ROAD AHEAD

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¶11. (C/NF) The recent popular press portrayals of a resurgent Russia, according to Shore, are balanced within the Canadian government by an awareness of the "deep vulnerabilities" within Russian society. He called the Russian military "a mess," with high rates of desertion and low morale due to hazing "that borders on torture." He pointed to Russia's declining birth rate and life expectancy as further causes to doubt that all was well in Russia, even as "Moscow glitters."

Shore added that the recent drop in hydrocarbon prices had caused a significant drop in foreign currency reserves, and that Prime Minister Putin seems to be using the current

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global economic turmoil to "reverse the oligarch process in a way that is not transparent."

¶12. (C/NF) Given Canada's recent pause in contacts and tough words, "the question for Canada," according to Shore, "is where do we go from here?" He said the Russians are clearly intent in seeking a cooperative relationship with NATO in regard to Afghanistan, narcotics, and counter-terrorism; Canada is eager to explore Russia's expressed willingness to cooperate. Shore commented that Canada recognized that it had "business to do with Russia, if for no other reason than that it can cause problems for Canadian interests," notably in Afghanistan and the Arctic. Noting that the Russians had now offered to begin discussions on pre-notification of Russian LRA in the polar region, Shore underscored Canadian desires to reach a common position on this issue with the U.S. beforehand.

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